DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 331 CG 018 424

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TITLE Work Commitment of Employed Married Women.
PUB DATE 22 Mar 85
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (Boston, MA, March 21-24, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Employed Women; *Employee Attitudes; *Family Influence; Females; *Part Time Employment; *Spouses; *Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Work Commitment

ABSTRACT

Since married women typically curtail their employment behavior to accommodate the needs of their family, it is often assumed that women have a relatively weak and unstable work commitment. However, it is erroneous to infer work commitment from behavior, since work behavior is motivated and constrained by a myriad of personal and social conditions. The relationship of familial and work characteristics in women's expression of work commitment was examined in 420 employed wives interviewed in 1976 as part of the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). All subjects were employed as either professional, managerial, sales, or clerical workers for 10 or more hours per week and reported having a child less than 18 years of age. Three PSID questionnaire items were used to determine the work commitment dimensions of subjective orientation, work plans, and work preference. Other PSID items were used to construct the work/family variables work hours, husband's attitude, and fertility plans. The results of a multivariate analysis of variance revealed significant main effects of work hours and husband's attitude, and a single interaction effect of husband's attitude by fertility plans. Other results indicated that the significant interaction effect was predominantly a function of work plans, while both main effects were predominantly functions of work plans and subjective orientation. These findings are consistent with other studies reporting that women who work part-time express higher work commitment in terms of subjective orientation to employment than do women who work full-time. (NRB)

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WORK COMMITMENT OF EMPLOYED MARRIED WOMEN

by

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CG 018424

Paper presented at the 1985 meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, March 22, 1985 in Boston, Massachusetts.

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In this paper, we present a conceptualization of the work commitment construct and examine the relationship of familial and work characteristics in women's expression of work commitment using data from the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics. Since married women typically curtail their employment behavior to accommodate the needs of their family, it is often assumed that women have relatively weak and unstable work commitment. However, it is erroneous to infer work commitment from behavior as work behavior is motivated and constrained by a myriad of personal and social conditions.

Currently, there exists great variability in both the conceptualization and operationalization of the work commitment construct. In a recent review of this problem, Morrow (1983) pointed out that there is considerable conceptual redundancy between such terms as work commitment, career salience and job involvement. Whereas career salience typically denotes the relative importance of work and a career in one's total life, and job involvement usually refers to the absorptiveness of work or one's psychological identification with one's job, our focus in this paper is the intrinsic value of work as an end in itself. That is, whether work is viewed as an interesting activity apart from extrinsic considerations. Such a conceptualization is frequently used in organizational behavior literature.

Work commitment has been traditionally operationalized either in terms of work plans, work preferences, or expectations and aspirations regarding work behavior. We propose that any individual item has limited utility. Rather the work commitment construct needs to be conceptualized in terms of multiple indicators which tap the saliency of employment for the individual as well as her plans and preferences for work behavior.

We operationalized work commitment using three items. The first we labelled "subjective orientation" and is measured by the question; "If you were

to get enough money to live as comfortably as you would like for the rest of your life, would you continue to work?" This is a traditional measure of the intrinsic value of employment and has been used in a number of studies (Haller & Rosenmayer, 1971; Orden & Bradburn, 1969; Angrist & Almquist, 1970).

Our item, "work preference" similarly taps the intrinsic value of employment apart from financial considerations, but is posed in terms of the number of hours one works. Our third item, "work plans" is intended to measure the woman's attitude toward continued labor force participation. As married women's labor force participation is usually optional, this measure is thought to capture more of the woman's tastes for market work than would be true for other populations (Dowdall, 1974). All items are scored so that a higher score indicates higher work commitment. Additional indicators would be desireable to capture the subtle differences in which work commitment may be expressed but for the present study, the questions which could be asked are limited by the data.

Since work commitment is likely to vary as a function of social conditions, our approach is to examine married women's work commitment in the context in which it is expressed. As women have been traditionally socialized to derive intrinsic satisfaction from their wife-mother duties, some theorists (Waite, 1980; Thomson, 1980; Kupinsky, 1977) contend that female work commitment reflects a tradeoff of work and familial activities. The economists cast this tradeoff relationship in terms of the opportunity costs of family and employment. As employment curtails the woman's available time for her wife-mother activities, opportunity costs of employment include further childbearing and time for marital companionship. Conversely, the reduction of work hours is an opportunity cost of the family. Another way to conceptualize this tradeoff relationship is the woman's assessment of job-family conflict, that is, how well she coordinates job and family responsibilities. For married women,

the perception of job-family conflict is highly dependent on their husband's attitude toward their employment (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979; Avioli, in press).

Slide 2 shows the measures we used to tap these trade-off costs. Work hours is a dichotomized variable split into full-time and part-time categories. Husband's attitude is the wife's perception of her husband's attitude toward the wife's employment. Fertility plans refers to the woman's intention for further childbearing constructed from two items from the PSID questionnaire.

It was hypothesized that women would express higher work commitment when employment was perceived as compatible with their familial activities. That is, the sense of work as an intrinsically valued activity is likely to be enhanced when the opportunity costs of employment are low.

Subjects

The sample consists of 420 employed wives interviewed in the 1976 wave of the PSID project (the only year to date that wives have been interviewed). Subjects were employed as either professional, managerial, sales or clerical workers for 10 or more hours per week and reported having a child less than 18 years of age.

Results

A complete design fixed-effects MANOVA was performed. As can be seen in Table 2, MANOVA results revealed significant main effects of work hours and husband's attitude, and a single significant interaction effect of husband's attitude by fertility plans. As trends of increase in a MANOVA may differ among the dependent variables, the univariate analyses and item mean values were also examined (Tatsuoka, 1971).

The significant interaction effect is predominantly a function of work plans. Women tend to plan on staying in the workforce when opportunity costs

of employment are low. That is, their husbands strongly favor their working and wives do not plan to have more children.

The main effect of husband's attitude is also predominantly a function of work plans, however subjective orientation also loads in the same direction. Women are more likely to plan on staying in the workforce and to work without financial motivation when their husbands are highly in favor of their employment.

The significant main effect of work hours is the most interesting finding. Once again the effect is predominantly a function of work plans and subjective orientation. However, as can be seen in the next slide, the trends of increase are contrary for the two items. When the opportunity cost for the family is high. that is, when women work full-time, they are more likely to plan on staying in the workforce. Whereas, when the opportunity cost for the family is low; when women work part-time and so they have more available time for familial activities, they are more likely to report that they would work without financial need.

Implications

The results confirm the importance of conceptualizing female work commitment in terms of multiple indicators as married women's plans, preferences and subjective orientation toward employment are differentially related to characteristics of their familial and work activities. Clearly, work commitment is not isomorphic with work behavior. Our findings are consistent with several recent studies (Bielby & Bielby, 1984; Moen & Smith, 1983; Thomson, 1980) indicating that part-time working women express higher work commitment in terms of subjective orientation to employment as compared to full-time working women. Many women may be committed to work, but elect to work part-time rather than full-time as it is easier to coordinate employment and family life,

particularly when children are young. However, what may appear to be an optimal trade-off in the short-run may be dysfunction to women's career development in the long run.

By using multiple indicators of the work commitment construct, we have been able to demonstrate the differential expression of work commitment of part-time and full-time working women. Ideally, full-time jobs which offer greater schedule flexibility, provisions for child care and other supports would combine the advantages of both part-time and full-time positions, promoting women's career development, as well as their work commitment.

Future research might well explore whether electing part-time employment constrains later career advancement and earnings, and whether this would be more true for some occupations than others. We are currently planning a follow-up longitudinal analysis to determine whether work commitment and changes in family life cycle stage predict subsequent employment behavior.

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SLIDE 1

Coding Schemes and PSID Questionnaire Items Used to Determine the Work Commitment Items

Item	Questionnaire Item(s)	Values
Subjective Orientation	"If you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you would like for the rest of your life, would you continue to work?"	(1) No (2) Don't Know (3) Yes
Work Plans	"Do you think you will keep on working for the next few years or do you plan to quit?"	(1) Plan To Quit (2) Keep On Working
Work Preference	"Would you have preferred to work less even if you had earned less money?"	(1) Prefer To Work Less Hours (2) Do Not Prefer To Work Less Hours

SLIDE 2

Coding Schemes and PSID Questionnaire Items Used to Construct the Work/Family Variables

Variable	Questionnaire Item(s)	Values
Work Hours	Wife's annual work hours in 1976. A woman averaging 35 or more hours per week is full time, 10-34 is part time.	Part Time Full Time
Husband's Attitude	"How does your husband feel about your working?"	Very Much In Favor Less Favorable
Fertility Plans	"Do you expect to have any more children?"	Plan To Have More Children
	"How sure are you that you will not have any more children?"	Not Sure Do Not Plan To Have More Children

Table 1

SLIDE 3

Work Commitment Items and Work/Family Characteristics

	Work Hours	Husband's Attitude	Work Hours by Husband's Attitude	Fertility Plans	Work Hours by Fertility Plans	Husband's Attitude by Fertility Plans	Work Hours by Husband's Attitude by Fertility Plans
Multivariate F (p)	4.40 (.005)	4.58 (.004)	1.00 (.393)	1.83 (.090)	0.88 (.509)	2.33 (.030)	0.21 (.973)
Univariate F (p)							
Subjective Orientation[a]	5.91 (.016)	3.82 (.051)	0.00 (.989)	0.30 (.744)	0.77 (.466)	0.48 (.619)	0.31 (.737)
Work Plans[b]	4.44 (.036)	9.58 (.002)	0.20 (.658)	4.29 (.014)	1.15 (.317)	5.18 (.006)	0.09 (.914)
Work Preference[c]	2.57 (.110)	2.44 (.119)	2.58 (.109)	1.58 (.208)	0.58 (.563)	2.43 (.089)	0.25 (.782)

NOTE. PROBABILITY FIGURES ARE IN PARENTHESES, df NOT INCLUDED. SEE TEXT FOR DETAILS OF WORK / FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS.

[a] "IF YOU WERE TO GET ENOUGH MONEY TO LIVE AS COMFORTABLY AS YOU WOULD LIKE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, WOULD YOU CONTINUE TO WORK?" CODED VALUES: (1) NO (2) DON'T KNOW (3) YES.

[b] "DO YOU THINK YOU WILL KEEP ON WORKING FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS OR DO YOU PLAN TO QUIT?" CODED VALUES: (1) PLAN TO QUIT (2) KEEP ON WORKING.

[c] "WOULD YOU HAVE PREFERRED TO WORK LESS EVEN IF YOU HAD EARNED LESS MONEY?" CODED VALUES: (1) PREFER TO WORK LESS HOURS (2) DO NOT PREFER TO WORK LESS HOURS.

Table 2

SLIDE 4

Mean Values of Work Commitment Items

	Work Hours[a]		Husband's Attitude[b]		Fertility Plans[c]		Husband's Attitude by Fertility Plans	
							Less[d]	More[e]
Subjective Orientation[f]	PT	2.36_a	Less	2.04_a	No	2.19	2.03	2.26
					NS	2.28	2.33	2.26
	FT	2.13_b	More	2.25_b	Yes	2.15	1.93	2.23
Work Plans[g]	PT	1.88_a	Less	1.86_a	No	1.95_a	1.90	1.97
					NS	1.92	2.00	1.89
	FT	1.94_b	More	1.96_b	Yes	1.86_b	1.71	1.92
Work Preference[h]	PT	1.79	Less	1.80	No	1.85	1.81	1.87
					NS	1.85	1.96	1.81
	FT	1.85	More	1.85	Yes	1.79	1.70	1.82

NOTE. NONSIGNIFICANT INTERACTION TERMS NOT INCLUDED. MEANS WITH DIFFERENT SUBSCRIPTS DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY AT $p<.05$. SEE TEXT FOR DETAILS OF WORK / FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS.

[a] PART TIME, n =112; FULL TIME, n =286.

[b] LESS FAVORABLE, n =108; MORE FAVORABLE, n =282.

[c] NO PLANS FOR CHILDREN, n =257; NOT SURE, n =47. YES PLAN TO HAVE MORE CHILDREN n =94.

[d] INTERACTION CATEGORIES NO/LESS, n =68; NOT SURE/LESS, n =12; YES/LESS, n =28.

[e] NO/MORE, n =182; NOT SURE/MORE, n =35; YES/MORE, n =65.

[f] "IF YOU WERE TO GET ENOUGH MONEY TO LIVE AS COMFORTABLY AS YOU WOULD LIKE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, WOULD YOU CONTINUE TO WORK?" CODED VALUES (1) NO (2) DON'T KNOW (3) YES.

[g] "DO YOU THINK YOU WILL KEEP ON WORKING FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS OR DO YOU PLAN TO QUIT?" CODED VALUES: (1) PLAN TO QUIT (2) KEEP ON WORKING.

[h] "WOULD YOU HAVE PREFERRED TO WORK LESS EVEN IF YOU HAD EARNED LESS MONEY?" CODED VALUES: (1) PREFER TO WORK LESS HOURS (2) DO NOT PREFER TO WORK LESS HOURS.